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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 05 ANKARA 005209

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MOPS](#) [EAI](#) [D](#) [TU](#) [I](#) [Z](#)

SUBJECT: TURKS AND TALAFAR: CONTINUING CONCERN, MOUNTING  
NEGATIVE PRESS COVERAGE

REF: A. ANKARA 5165

[1](#)B. BETTS-BULLOCK ET AL EMAILS 9/6/05

Classified By: A/DCM James R. Moore for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (U) This is an action request--please see para. 4.

[1](#)2. (C) Summary: The GOT continues to express deep concern about the situation in Talafar, a predominantly Turkmen city in northwest Ninewah province. MFA officials have peppered us with questions about the latest situation there and have made several official requests over the course of the past four days, enumerated below. Negative Turkish press coverage of the Talafar operation is mounting, including claims that CF have killed 500 Turkmen and used chemical weapons. The GOT wants to send humanitarian assistance to Talafar and seeks coordination with us and the Iraqis. MFA officials have made it clear to us that they want to work with us to manage Turkish public opinion, implying that Turkish politicians may soon feel compelled to speak out against the United States if the negative press coverage keeps piling up. End summary.

[1](#)3. (C) Turkish officials and emboffs have been in constant touch since Sept. 1 regarding the situation in Talafar. Specifically, as reported ref a, MFA Director General for the Middle East phoned Charge Sept. 1 to express Turkey's concern about CF/IA operations in Talafar. On Sept. 2, Celikkol called in A/DCM to provide a fuller readout of the Aug. 17 meeting in Ankara of Turkmen tribal leaders and FonMin Gul. Celikkol handed over the internal MFA report on the meeting, which differed little from the readout the GOT's Deputy Special Envoy for Iraq provided us Sept. 1 (also reftel--for full text, see para. 12 below). Celikkol added that there are still hard feelings among some Turkmen tribes from what they perceive was harsh treatment by CF during the major September 2004 operation there.

#### Humanitarian Aid Offers

[1](#)4. (C) Action Request: Celikkol reported that--based on the request by the Turkmen tribes--Turkey is ready to provide the following humanitarian assistance (HA) for Talafar:

--food, water, and medical supplies, to be trucked from Turkey to meet immediate needs,

--Turkish experts to work on the water supply project in Talafar, and

--equipment and "some staff" to renovate Talafar's only hospital.

Celikkol said that the tribal leaders told Gul that they can provide security within Talafar city for Turks supplying HA, but that outside the city "peshmerga" (former peshmerga now enlisted in the Iraqi Army) control the situation. Embassy requests immediate guidance from the Department and Embassy Baghdad on coordinating the Turks' aid offer. (Comment: We are already in touch with Embassy Baghdad on this issue. End Comment.)

#### Turkish Concerns re Kurds

[1](#)5. (C) Late on Sept. 3, PolMilOff provided the latest releasable sitreps on both political and operational developments in Talafar to MFA Head of Department H. Avni Botsali. Botsali subsequently called and--on instructions, presumably from Celikkol--asked us to pass on Turkey's concern about the composition of IA forces in and around Talafar. The GOT is concerned that former peshmerga in the IA are intimidating the local Turkmen population.

[1](#)6. (C) Late on Sept. 5, Celikkol--on instructions from FonMin Gul--called PolMilCouns to request that the Embassy issue a press release in order to counter what he described as "small but growing public interest" in the operation there. Specifically, Celikkol asked that we make three points:

--Our operations are only targeting terrorists and Baathists,  
--We are not targeting civilians, and  
--Our forces are taking all precautions to avoid civilian casualties.

Embassies Baghdad and Ankara coordinated on a statement we released to the press on Sept. 7 (see ref b). Full text in para. 11 below.

Sunni Turkmen Afraid to Pass Through Shia Neighborhoods?

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17. (C) Celikkol discussed additional Turkish concerns on Talafar with PolMilOff on Sept. 6. The Turks had learned that CF and IA had issued an evacuation order for Sarai, a heavily Sunni Turkmen neighborhood (and apparently the insurgents' main base in the city). Celikkol said he had heard reports that the route prescribed in the evacuation order required that Sarai's inhabitants pass through Shia neighborhoods, and that the residents were concerned that they would face intimidation or attack from "Badr Brigade forces" on this route. He also cited reports that a "tent city" being constructed outside Talafar is already short of tents, and reiterated Turkey's offer to provide humanitarian supplies for Talafar, including tents.

We're Getting Hammered in the Press  
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18. (C) Celikkol repeated his minister's request for a U.S. statement on Talafar, noting increasingly negative coverage of the operation in the Turkish press. Numerous press reports claim we are targeting civilians. Yeni Safak, an Islamist paper hypercritical of the U.S.--and PM Erdogan's newspaper of choice--claimed Sept. 7 that CF are using chemical weapons in Talafar, adding that CF have killed 500 Turkmen there.

19. (C) Following up with MFA's Botsali late on Sept. 6, PolMilOff passed on guidance from TFF that we know of no "tent city" outside of Talafar, and that of the over 700 residents who passed through the CF/IA screening area, only a small handful had chosen to stay in the Displaced Civilian Rest Area now established. Additionally, TFF does not evaluate that Sunnis passing through the current evacuation route from Sarai face any danger from Shias.

110. (C) We have done our best to work with the GOT to provide real-time information on the situation in Talafar, and deeply appreciate the efforts of our colleagues in Talafar, Mosul, and Baghdad to assist us in this effort. The Turks claim deep historical links with the Turkmen of Talafar and are also concerned with what they perceive as Kurdish designs in Ninewah province and elsewhere in Iraq; therefore we should not be surprised that public and press sentiments are already on the rise. We believe the MFA is pressing us hard in order to prevent the near-crisis in our relations that occurred almost exactly one year ago, when FonMin Gul threatened to cut all assistance to Iraq and our efforts there over a major operation in Talafar at that time. With two-thirds of humanitarian fuel for the Iraqi people coming through Turkey as well as one-quarter of CF sustainment fuel plus other supplies, the stakes are high. We are working with the Turks to correct the misinformation they receive from ill-informed or malicious Turkmen sources, as well as to persuade the Turkish public that we are not targeting Turkmen civilians.  
END COMMENT.

111. (U) Text of Embassy press release on Talafar.

BEGIN TEXT

Ankara, September 7, 2005. A number of claims appearing in the Turkish media concerning military operations in the Iraqi city of Tal Afar contain significant distortions and inaccuracies. The current operations in Tal Afar are being conducted to provide a safe and secure environment for the people who live there. These operations are aimed at removing the terrorists and foreign fighters who are using Tal Afar as a base of operations. The units conducting the operations are going to great lengths to reduce the effects on the civilian population and infrastructure. Evacuation efforts are underway to provide safe passage for families desiring to leave the area where these operations are focused. Evacuation messages are being sent through various channels, including radio broadcasts, and through discussion with local tribal leaders from each of the elements living in Tal Afar. These operations are in no way targeted at any ethnic group - the sole focus of these operations is on the terrorists and foreign fighters trying to control the city. Coalition forces do not possess chemical weapons, so any accusation that suggests their employment is categorically false.

END TEXT

112. (C) Text of internal MFA readout of Aug. 17 Talafar Turkmen meeting with FonMin Gul (informal embassy translation, note internal paragraph numbering):

BEGIN TEXT

SIPDIS

Middle East Directorate  
August 19, 2005

1) The Talafar delegation, whom were received by the Minister on August 17th 2005, pointed out the following issues:

1. Population of Talafar is 350,000 in the city, and reaches 500,000 including the population of villages on the outskirts. There are very few Arabs and Kurds in these villages; all of Talafar's population (inside the city) is Turkmen.

2. From the collapse of the Baath Regime in April 2003 until September 2004, Talafar was at peace and was pointed out as a model Iraqi town in that period.

3. From April 2003 until September 2004, Talafar inhabitants supported the government. For instance the Central Bank Branch, which was occupied at that time, was moved to a house and continued its activities in the house. Economic activities were being conducted normally during that period.

4. Talafar inhabitants were trying to solve the training problem in the city before the U.S. operations of September 2004. (NFI)

5. Talafar is located on the Iraqi road connecting Turkey to Syria which also has a link to Mosul.

6. There are vast and fertile cultivation lands surrounding the city. Before the war, Talafar and Mosul were called "Iraq's bread basket."

7. Talafar is also rich in water resources.

8. Tensions and incidents in Talafar started after the military operation which was launched in September 2004.

9. Since that operation about 100,000 persons left the city. Most of these people have not come back to the city yet. Many of the women, whom were obliged to leave the city, had to even deliver their babies in the desert under extremely difficult conditions.

10. The city has serious infrastructure problems. Its electricity and water supplies are very restricted. No water has been supplied to Talafar within the last 5 months. Electricity is only provided for a few hours a day. The condition of the roads in the city is quite bad.

11. Before the war, a construction project was launched for pipelines to supply water from Mosul to Talafar. However, the construction could not be completed due to financial considerations. This construction was restarted very slowly after the fall of the regime. However, after construction materials were stolen from the site, the slow construction activities were stopped again.

12. The only hospital in the city, which is not sufficient in terms of medical facilities, is under the occupation of the Peshmerga Kurds wearing (the Iraqi) national police uniform. For this reason, most of Talafar's inhabitants - who are conservative - don't use the hospital, while most women and children are sent to clinics. Those Talafar inhabitants who are obliged to go to the hospital are subjected to mistreatment and the degrading attitude of the soldiers.

13. Talafar's bazaar has been closed for 6 months. No economic and trade activities have been carried out there since then.

14. In fact inhabitants of Talafar would not normally have left their city under any conditions. However, economic conditions have forced them to migrate out of the city.

15. There are no employment opportunities in the city.

16. 140 Talafar inhabitants are currently under detention by Kurds. Traveling to Turkey by land through Zakho is not safe for Turkmen.

17. Kurdish groups aim at capturing Mosul by creating Shiite-Sunni conflict among Turkmen in Talafar, forcing Turkmen to move out of the city, and by changing the demographic structure of Talafar.

2) After discussing the above mentioned issues, the delegation members indicated that the current disagreement in Talafar was not between the Talafar tribes or Sunni-Shiite groups, but was between the Talafar inhabitants and the Iraqi government. They further noted that insurgents in the city were gaining power from the current situation. The delegation

members also stated that the Iraqi government must become aware of this fact and do the following in order to solve problems in Talafar:

--hand over the security of Talafar to a security group consisting of the Shiites and Sunnis of Talafar

--open the Talafar bazaar and reactivate the city's economy

--free the hospital and other government offices from Iraqi National Police control

--accelerate infrastructure activities in the city including construction of a water project.

The delegation also noted that when these actions are taken, the insurgency would be deterred and Talafar's inhabitants, who are living in an environment of conflict and disagreement which originates from being low-spirited due to the above-mentioned issues, would be able to return back to their work.

3) Talafar delegation requested the following actions be taken by the Turkish authorities:

--To negotiate the above-mentioned issues and suggestions with the high level U.S. authorities and to convince them of the importance of these steps,

--To discuss and follow up the mentioned issues with the Iraqi administration and the government, as well as the Iraqi Prime Minister and other ministers,

--To assist in providing economic and employment opportunities in the city.

The Talafar delegation also noted that all the listed activities could be carried out in cooperation with the Talafar Subgovernor.

4) The Minister stated that the following during the visit of the Talafar delegation:

a. All Turkmen from Talafar, Sunnis and Shiites, are to act with each other in full unity and cooperation and get over any disagreements.

b. Talafar inhabitants should participate in the political process in Iraq. They should not support the insurgency and others acting in that way and should cooperate with the government and coalition forces.

c. Turkey will provide the necessary humanitarian assistance to Talafar as soon as possible.

d. Turkey will hold meetings with the U.S. and Iraqi authorities on the situation and required efforts in Talafar.

END TEXT  
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